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EASTERN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

The number of people living with HIV in Eastern Europe and Central Asia reached an estimated 1.6 million in 2005. Around 62,000 adults and children died of AIDS-related illnesses in 2005 and some 270,000 people were newly infected with HIV. Around 75% of the reported infections between 2000 and 2004 were in people younger than 30 years (in Western Europe, the corresponding figure was 33%).

- The bulk of the people living with HIV in this region are in two countries: the **Russian Federation** and **Ukraine**.
- **Ukraine's** epidemic continues to grow, with more new HIV diagnoses occurring each year, while **Russia** has the biggest AIDS epidemic in all of Europe.
- In 2004, 30% or more of all new reported HIV infections in **Kazakhstan** and **Ukraine**, and 45% or more in **Belarus** and the **Republic of Moldova**, were due to unprotected sex.
- HIV has consolidated its presence in every part of the former Soviet Union, with the exception of **Turkmenistan**. Several **Central Asian** and **Caucasian** republics are experiencing the early stages of epidemics, while substantial risky behaviour in south-eastern Europe suggests that HIV could strengthen its presence there unless prevention efforts are stepped up.
- At the heart of **Russia's** epidemic are extraordinarily large numbers of young people who inject drugs. There were more than 340,000 registered injecting drug users in the Russian Federation at the end of 2004, although the actual number of injectors could be four to ten times as high. Estimates vary, but at least 1% and possibly as much as 2% of the country's population injects drugs, and an estimated 5-8% of all men younger than 30 years have injected drugs.
- The epidemic in **Russia** is now becoming more mature. Most drug injectors are sexually active and, if HIV-infected, they can transmit the virus sexually to their casual or regular partners. Studies in Togliatti and Nizhny Novgorod found that more than 80% of male drug injectors did not use condoms regularly in the last month. Consequently, a significant rise in sexual transmission has been observed. About 6% of registered HIV infections were related to sexual transmission in 2001; by 2004, that proportion had grown to 25%.
- Reported cases of pregnant women with HIV in **Russia** have increased manifold in the past six years, and the total number of children born to HIV-positive mothers now exceeds 13,000.
- By mid-2005, fewer than 10% (a mere 4,000-6,500 people) of those in need of antiretroviral therapy in **Russia** were receiving it.
- Fuelled by injecting drug use and unprotected sex, **Ukraine's** epidemic shows no signs of abating. The annual number of newly reported HIV cases continues to rise and exceeded 12,400 in 2004, almost 25% more than the 10,000 cases diagnosed in 2003 and almost double the number diagnosed in 2000.

- A study in the eight most-affected regions of **Ukraine** found HIV prevalence among injecting drug users as high as 58% in Odessa and 59% in Simferopol. Risk behaviour among injecting drug users remains widespread. A recent national study found that only 20% of drug injectors said they avoided using non-sterile injecting equipment and practiced safe sex. The proportion of people infected through sexual transmission of HIV has increased from 14% of new cases (1999-2003) to over 32% in 2004.
- With women accounting for 42% of people newly-diagnosed with HIV in **Ukraine** in 2004, the number of children born to HIV-positive mothers continues to rise, and was over 2,200 in 2004. On this front, Ukraine is making headway. The rate of mother-to-child transmission of HIV has decreased from 28% in 2001 to less than 10% in 2003, one of the lowest in Eastern Europe.
- More than 17 000 people in **Ukraine** are estimated to be in need of antiretroviral treatment. Supported by the Global Fund, **Ukraine** is rapidly expanding access to antiretroviral treatment. Beginning in September 2004, more than 2,400 new patients were put on treatment within one year, with 90% still alive and on treatment at six months. These programmes need to be expanded rapidly.
- In the Baltic states, the epidemic continues to grow but at a slower pace than in the early 2000s. The overall numbers of reported HIV infections remain low. Nonetheless, the total number of reported HIV cases in **Estonia**, the worst-affected of the Baltic states, has doubled since end-2001, reaching 4,442 in 2004.
- **Latvia** is also seeing a steady rise in the total number of HIV cases, which by mid-2005 was more than six times higher than it had been in 1999 (3,169 compared with 492).
- The surge of new HIV cases reported in **Lithuania** in 2002 (when new diagnosis increased five-fold in one year) appears to have subsided to some extent. In 2004, 135 infections were reported, the vast majority of them attributable to injecting drug use.
- In **Belarus** (where more than 6,200 people had been diagnosed with HIV by the end of 2004) and **Moldova** (where the figure stood at over 2,300), the epidemic shows no sign of slowing.
- Among the Central Asian republics, **Uzbekistan** is experiencing the most dynamic epidemic. In 1999, just 28 HIV diagnoses were reported there; in 2004 there were 2,016 new HIV infections, bringing to more than 5,600 the total number of HIV cases.
- **Kazakhstan's** epidemic is centred on young people who inject drugs, some of whom also engage in commercial sex. Almost 4,700 HIV cases had been reported there by end-2004—more than three times the total just four years earlier.

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